

12 | National Educational Longitudinal Survey (NELS:88) Dropout Survey and Findings

A follow-up to the National Educational Longitudinal Survey of 1988 (NELS:88), “Two Years Later: Cognitive Gains and School Transitions of NELS Eighth Graders” (<http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=95436>), explored the reasons students dropped out of school early. The study disaggregated reasons for leaving school by gender. Apparently, young men often leave school for reasons related to lack of engagement, foreshadowing *The Silent Epidemic* survey of a decade later.

Consider using the NELS:88 questions, and discuss them with last year’s dropouts and the students you consider to be potential future dropouts. With this new learning, you will be better able to design a support system to keep students in school. (Note: categorizations were added by authors of *Grad Nation*.)

Students’ Reported Reasons for Dropping Out of High School Early			
SCHOOL REASONS	Boys	Girls	Categorization
Didn’t like school	58%	44%	Fade-out
Couldn’t get along with teachers	52%	17%	Fade-out
Felt didn’t belong at school	31%	14%	Fade-out
Couldn’t get along with peers	18%	22%	Fade-out
Suspended too often	19%	13%	Push-out
Expelled from school	18%	9%	Push-out
Changed schools and didn’t like new one	11%	16%	Fade-out
Failing school	46%	33%	Failing
Couldn’t keep up with work	38%	25%	Failing
ECONOMIC REASONS			
Had to get a job	15%	16%	Life-event
Found a job	19%	12%	Life-event
Couldn’t work and go to school both	20%	8%	Life-event
Had to support a family	5%	14%	Life-event
FAMILY REASONS			
Became pregnant	—	31%	Life-event
Married or planned to get married	3%	24%	Life-event
Became a father/mother	5%	23%	Life-event
Had to care for my family	5%	12%	Life-event
Wanted to have a family	4%	8%	Life-event
PERSONAL REASONS			
Friends dropped out of school	17%	11%	Fade-out
Wanted to travel	3%	2%	Fade-out

Written by

Robert Balfanz
Joanna Hornig Fox
Everyone Graduates Center

John M. Bridgeland
Mary McNaught
Civic Enterprises

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